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ABSTRACT

Research concerning the success factors in language immersion education is reviewed, focusing on five major schools of thought. First, the traditional model for immersion research, implemented in a Montreal (Canada) suburb is examined. Then three studies of the influence of affective variables in immersion program success are examined, and it is noted that no theoretical overview of the importance of the affective aspects is known. Theorists and researchers considering the social facet of the immersion process and two works on the interrelationship between social and affective factors in the immersion setting are discussed next. Finally, Stephen Krashen's monitor model is compared with the others, and found to be the most relevant to immersion theory. A 27-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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The Second Language Acquisition Process in Immersion Contexts: Theory and Research

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The success of immersion language programs in North America has received widespread attention. Indeed, Krashen (1985) notes that ". . . Canadian-style immersion is clearly the most successful language teaching program ever recorded in the language teaching literature" (p.66). Swain & Lapkin (1982) and Genesee (1983, 1985, 1987) provide summaries of the immersion experience and overviews of the relevant research.

Immersion program reports constitute the majority of material available in the scholarly literature, a preponderance which Burns (1976) labels a "narrow focus on student achievement" (p.574). As this pedagogical approach was initially treated as an experiment, parents and school authorities demanded detailed, annual descriptions of program objectives and evaluations. Much of the debate over this material is centered on these outcome data, their validity, and interpretation, as summarized by Singh (1986) and Spilka (1976).

In contrast, the theoretical foundations of immersion have been accorded little attention. This paper outlines the major schools of thought regarding the "why's" of the immersion success.[1] As a traditional starting point, Lambert & Tucker (1972) is examined, and the theoretical rationale presented therein is outlined and analyzed. Second, the work of researchers who emphasize the importance of affective variables in the immersion experience is presented. Third, the contributions of theorists and researchers detailing the role of social factors are described. Then, the commentaries of Swain and Schumann, who highlight the interplay of the social and the affective, are reviewed. Last, Krashen's "monitor model" is detailed in light of immersion and subject-matter teaching in the second language classroom.

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[1] The development in the language skills of learners in immersion is the sole focus of this discussion. Academic progress under such conditions is a parallel avenue of inquiry. The reader is referred to Genesee (1987) for a summary of research relevant to that topic.. It must be noted that not everyone herald immersion as an unqualified success.

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St. Lambert

Lambert & Tucker (1972) is the traditional model for immersion research. This report of the pioneering immersion project in the Montreal suburb of St. Lambert, however, presents a curiously fragmented and incomplete theoretical picture; the authors provide such background information only in passing, offer no detailed comment thereon, and do not attempt to argue the validity of their theoretical assumptions in light of the reported results.

Lambert & Tucker note, first, the importance of age in the language learning process. Citing the research of Penfield and Roberts, they state that the parents' group which served as a driving force behind this project was

> impressed with the recent educational research that showed what could be accomplished in teaching science and mathematics in kindergarten and elementary grades, and they realized how valuable early experience with a foreign language can be. (p.3)

Moreover, the parents also expressed a desire to initiate language contact "before stereotypes and prejudices had a chance to form" (p. 221). Exposure to a large amount of target-language discourse was considered key. In her review of the St. Lambert project presented in an appendix, parent Olga Milikoff commented: "The essence of the problem was how to increase the number of contact hours in French to attain fluency without sacrificing subject matter" (p. 223).

These assumptions receive little critical analysis, however, and limited comment. The researchers offer, for example, no detailed statistical information regarding the total hours of student exposure to the target language; nor do they consider this input factor in the final data presentation and summary.

In the work's summary, the authors note several affective changes and outcome behaviors manifest by the immersion learners. In a "Pupils' Opinions" questionnaire, Lambert & Tucker discover that, by grade five, sixty-five percent of the experimental group consider themselves "both French and English," rather than "more English-Canadian" or "more French-Canadian." A decidedly smaller number of the English- and French-speaking (monolingual) control students manifest such a balanced orientation. The researchers summarize this finding, noting that: "By the end of grades IV and V . . . they [immersion pupils] have come to appreciate French people and French ways of life"(p. 200).

However, although Lambert & Tucker consider this development "at least as important as the mastery of the other group's language" (p. 206), they do not consider the potential impact of increasaed empathy levels on the linguistic development of the immersion cohort.

Increased interest in the study of French is also demonstrated by the immersion language learners. "A great deal of French," Lambert & Tucker conclude, "has merely whetted the appetites of the experimental group children"(p. 208). Moreover, the researchers outline a rapidly developing general interest in language on the part of the students in the experimental immersion groups; these phenomena are labeled "language detective skills." In a description of the immersion cohort, this occurrence is featured:

> Another recurring process experienced by the children was . . . the early development of linguistic "detective" capacity, that is, an attentive, patient, inductive concern with words, meanings, and linguistic regularities (p. 208).

Increased interest levels and related outcome behaviors are, however, relegated to the conclusion of the work, and no consideration of the potential importance of these increased levels is offered in the interpretation of the final results. Developing student self-esteem levels are similarly overlooked.

The social facet also receives limited comment. By design, Lambert & Tucker attempt to minimize the influence of socio-cultural factors in the study's results. With a complex program of pre-testing students and interviewing parents, these researchers isolated control groups comprised of students and parents statistically comparable to the immersion cohort. But both Burns (1986) and Genesee (1987) point out that the immersion learners and their controls were generally pupils of middle and upper-middle class background, potentially a factor in the experiment's outcome.

In sum, Lambert & Tucker (1972) is a presentation of the research findings; references to the reasons for the success of this pedagogical approach are few. The authors omit comment on a host of affective developments manifest by immersion students. Input factors, too, receive limited attention. The authors, then, offer no broad, theoretical framework in which to interpret the findings. They present no systematic overview of the factors governing the language development process under the experimental conditions. Omission of comment on the role of affective factors is especially interesting since Lambert was conducting work at St. Lambert while

simultaneously writing with Gardner the well-known 1972 work which highlights the critical nature of attitude and motivation in the second language development process.

Affective Variables

No comprehensive theoretical examination of the role of affective variables in second language development under immersion conditions is present in the literature. The writers of several research reports do, however, consider selected affective variables, such as personality factors, in immersion settings.

Swain & Burnaby (1976) examine affective variables and their roles in formal educational environments. Recalling that differences in personality characteristics had been noted between students in early-grade French-language immersion programs and their counterparts in English-language classes, these researchers attempt to statistically document this disparity; immersion and non-immersion children in Ontario served as subjects. This replication did uncover such inequalities. Immersion students, as a group, are found to be more "happy", more "cheerful", more "talkative", and to have a "greater tendency toward perfectionism," as assessed by their classroom teachers.

The scope of this study is limited. Methodological problems, moreover, are rife. Only scant, summary data are provided. Indeed, little information regarding the role of factors of affect in immersion settings is offered; only the presence of such is documented.

Two other research reports offer a more comprehensive examination of the influence of affect on linguistic development in immersion contexts. Hayaman, Genesee, & Tucker (1977) and Tucker, Hayaman & Genesee (1976) are both similar in design to Swain & Burnaby. Again, affective variables are examined as predictors of linguistic skill. In both of these studies, students from early immersion, late immersion, and monolingual (English-speaking) control groups were selected as subjects. Importantly, these authors include motivational factors in their investigation, as well. Indeed, level of motivation was found to be the sole significant predictor of success on the chosen language testing instrument. This result, too, was consistent across subject groups. The writers conclude that

> regardless of group membership, students who are highly motivated, who have high need achievement and who have positive attitudes toward the French language and its speakers will perform better in all four aspects of French than those students who do not . . . (1976, p. 224).

With these findings, the uniqueness of the immersion language learning environment is minimized.

Additionally, in reporting this research, these authors highlight an important methodological concern:

> To date, the evaluations of different types of French immersion programs have provided valuable information about the performance of *groups* of individuals receiving one type of second language training or another. However, these studies may mask some interesting individual variations within these groups. Thus although the pupils participating in the bilingual . . . programs have developed, as a group, a far greater facility in French than English pupils who have followed a conventional French-as-a- second-language program, it is nevertheless the case that there exists a wide range of variation in the French proficiency of both immersion students and pupils in conventional programs (1977, p. 227).

In sum, no theoretical overview of the importance of affective variables in immersion language learning is known; research studies considering such factors in these settings are few. Thus, to date no broader conclusion regarding affective impact is possible. Given the higher levels of interest demonstrated, almost universally, by immersion students (v. Genesee, 1983) and the results of Hayaman, Genesee, & Tucker, the role of affect and related factors warrants further examination.

Social Variables

Several theorists and researchers consider the social facet of the immersion process. Burns (1986), Baral (1983), and Genesee(1976) review the relevant literature. The central theme of these reviews is summarized by Genesee:

> The vast majority of the research results emanating from French immersion projects have been relevant to a particular student population, namely, predominantly middle class, majority group youngsters of average or above average intelligence, with no particular problems and who are, therefore, likely to be relatively successful students. This bias in the research probably reflects the composition of most French immersion classes (p. 494).

Burns, in a sharper critique of the research literature, suggests that hidden social inequalities distort the final results and thus taint

the outcome data. Immersion "tends to be class biased" and achieving similar results "among the masses", he notes, is an "entirely different matter" (p. 584). Burns cites as research support for his contentions, however, only one unpublished review of immersion reporting methods, a document which he himself co-authored.

Statistic evidence of the selective nature of immersion cohorts has come to light; Trites & Price (1978), for example, examine biographical information from one thousand primary school pupils in Ontario and conclude that students entering French immersion programs tended to be "better off" financially, were more likely to have attended pre-school, were more often read to at home, and were more likely to have parents interested in French language.

Genesee (1976) sounds a note of caution, however. Citing the experiences of working class children and children from minority groups in immersion settings, he concludes that such subjects regularly performed as well in immersion environments (demonstrating both subject-matter and linguistic development) as did their middle class counterparts. He describes, moreover, an ongoing project of immersion programs within the Cincinnati public schools-- work which, to date, had uncovered no significant performance disparity linked to ethnic or socioeconomic background (v. also Genesee, 1987).

To conclude, several writers have argued that social factors play a critical role in the immersion success. This conclusion is not universally accepted, however; Genesee cites important research support to the contrary.

Affective and Social Variables

Two theoretical works examine the interrelationship between social and affective factors in immersion settings. Swain (1983) and Cohen & Swain (1976) suggest that the presence of social inequalities in a bilingual education classroom produces affective manifestations.

To develop this argument, Canadian-style immersion is contrasted with the bilingual education programs often encountered by non-English-speaking students completing an education in North American schools. Swain labels this type of schooling "submersion." She maintains that the relative prestige of the first and second languages is of critical importance. The comparatively

lower prestige of the first language in submersion settings, she contends, is manifest in program organization and implementation and this has clear consequences, in the affective sphere, for the native-speakers of the language of lower prestige.

Such students are, Swain notes, frequently "grouped indiscriminately with native English speakers" (1976, p. 45), and are confronted with teachers who are seldom specialists in language pedagogy. The linguistically monolithic nature of immersion student cohort, populated by native-speakers of a single language, and the pedagogical background of most immersion instructors stands in sharp contrast. The result for students in submersion, Swain argues, are negative effects on identity, orientation, self-esteem, and motivation; such affective changes hinder linguistic development. These writers believe that in the shortcomings of submersion-type programs are visible the factors which bring about successful linguistic and academic progress in immersion contexts.

Neither Swain nor Cohen & Swain cite a significant body of research as support for their contentions. To this end, a study of the *English* -language immersion experience of native French speakers (a linguistic minority in Canada) would offer a uniquely insightful opportunity to assess the views of these theorists in a more controlled manner; no such program, however, has received review.

Within arguments for his "acculturation model," Schumann (1978) also discusses the immersion experience with reference to social and affective considerations. He notes, in a brief paragraph, that immersion appears to offer evidence contradictory to this hypothesis, since students of immersion acquire second language proficiency in relative isolation from native-speakers of the target language. Schumann retorts, however, that such schooling must be viewed as an early stage of acculturation; he considers

> second language acquisition in these immersion contexts to be a product of *enculturation*. In fact, reports emerging from the immersion programs indicate that there may be a level at which students cannot develop further without contact with native speakers of TL [target language]. . . . Thus, acculturation may be necessary to complete the learning process begun in the immersion programs (49).

Schumann's brief comment requires further development.

To summarize, the interplay between affective and social variables has also been proffered as the reason for successful second language development during immersion. But much of the comment to date remains unsupported by a body of research work.

Input Variables

The writings of Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985) offer a theoretical outline, tied to a growing body of research, to account for linguistic development during the immersion process. His widely-known "monitor model" predicts that exposure to "input," meaningful target-language material at a linguistic level at least minimally challenging to the hearer at the moment of exposure, is the sole causal variable in the second language acquisition process.

Krashen's model also considers the variables of affect, specifically, how such considerations influence the input process. He contends that such affective facets must be related to subconscious language acquisitions rather than to conscious learning; Krashen describes an "affective filter," a screen through which input is processed. This theorist offers a succinct summary of his model and its key elements:

> People acquire second languages when they obtain comprehensible input and when their affective filters are low enough to let the input in. In other words, comprehensible input is the only causative variable in second language acquisition. All other factors thought to encourage or cause second language acquisition only work when they are related to comprehensible input (1981, p. 62).

Krashen then proceeds to argue that acquisition, as opposed to formal learning, is the sole basis of true fluency, thus directly tying input to the successful mastery of a second language.

Within the framework of this model, Krashen then offers an explanation of the immersion process, stating that

> immersion "works" because, like other good methods, it provides the students with a great deal of comprehensible input-- subject matter material is made comprehensible to immersion students in several ways: the exclusion of native speakers helps ensure that teachers will speak at a language level comprehensible to the non-native speaker, and text and materials are supplemented and adapted to the immersion students' level (1985, p. 16).

Krashen further argues that the educational setting of immersion is marked by an ideal affective climate. Pupils want to understand the instructor, and therefore they channel interest for school into the language acquisition process. Anxiety levels in such contexts are, he contends, often low.

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While Lambert & Tucker suggested that massive amounts of exposure were a theoretical necessity, Krashen contends that.it is not the amount of input alone that is critical, but rather the meaningfulness of the target language material:

> The Input Hypothesis thus asserts that it is the comprehensible input factor that is responsible for the success of immersion, not simply the fact that immersion students are exposed to a great deal of second language (1985, p. 17).

To support this contention, he cites the linguistic development manifested by university-level language learners in an immersion-like context (Edwards, Wesche, Krashen, Clement, Kruidenier, 1984). Indeed, Krashen claims the vast immersion research literature as empirical basis for his proposed model of second language development

Krashen's 1985 work, *The Input Hypothesis*, also contains suggestions for practical application of his ideas. Chief among these is the description of a "sheltered language course," subject-matter teaching in a target language at the post-secondary level. He outlines the possible applications of this idea to intermediate- and advanced-level classes in English as a Second Language in the U. S. And Edwards *et al.*, cited above, describes the implementation of sheltered tuition at the University of Ottawa.

As a theoretical model with a body of research support, the work of Krashen must be considered most relevant to the mosaic of immersion theory. First, he is the sole writer to directly poses the question: "Why does immersion work?" He responds with a comprehensive theoretical response. In contrast, Lambert & Tucker (1972) give scant attention to this matter, and their research focus is reflected in much of the later literature.

For reasons of scope, too, Krashen's explanation of the immersion phenomenon must be considered superior. Cohen & Swain (1976), to cite an example, discuss the role of affect in the immersion process, yet paint no larger or more detailed framework for the second language development process in such settings.

With such theoretical breadth, Krashen does not directly contradict much of the above-cited commentary and research. In fact, he embraces the suggestions of Cohen & Swain (1976) in his description of affective considerations in immersion language development.

Last, ongoing empirical research relevant to the immersion-like settings of sheltered language courses continues to provide support

for Krashen's conceptualization of linguistic development in such settings.

Arguably, one might contend that the "monitor model" was developed, at least in part, in light of the immersion movement. Indeed, this theoretical framework achieved near-final form between 1972 and 1976, a time period clearly corresponding to the initial burst of interest in immersion following Lambert & Tucker (1972) and the dissemination of a wealth of research material from pilot immersion programs in Canada. Whether Krashen's model predicts the immersion success, or whether the immersion data were crucial in the development of the model must remain an open question.

For reasons of scope and empirical support, then, the arguments of Krashen must be considered most useful. With his comprehensive theoretical outline of the second language development process, he offers the best explanation of "why immersion works" currently available.

The above-cited writers and researchers have, nonetheless, outlined directions for further research and investigation on this theme. Lambert & Tucker note the importance of age in the immersion context, an emphasis which has received only limited attention. Work with sheltered students will be crucial in this respect. Swain & Burnaby highlight personality factors, and Tucker, Hayaman, & Genesee give attention to attitudinal and motivational variables as well. These affective themes, too, warrant further investigation relative to immersion environments. The questions of social background examined by Burns and Swain require empirical research. And the commentary of Schumann, linking his ideas on "acculturation" to immersion environments is wanting for further development. In short, many of the unknowns in the immersion equation highlight areas of debate and uncertainty relative to second language development generally.

Nonetheless, to highlight the debate regarding the "why's" of language development during immersion in no way degrades this educational approach. The results of immersion schooling are manifest and well-documented. That the theoretical bases of such tuition require critical examination in no way lessens the practical results reported to date. On the contrary, an incomplete picture of the theoretical underpinnings of immersion and immersion-like contexts should serve to bring about a higher level of interest in this educational approach on the part of second language acquisition thinkers and researchers.

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